

# The Great Tide Pool

**TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA**

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

## **JULIA'S CHILD**

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March is National Women's History Month, so let's celebrate a woman - born in 1857 - who indisputably ranks as one of the most impressive and influential people ever to set foot in Pacific Grove. If there were a Mount Rushmore of PG icons, perhaps carved into the rocky coastline, Julia Platt would be the Jefferson. Except this conservationist wouldn't dare let folks disturb those seaside rocks.

If anyone deserves to be called the "Mother of Pacific Grove," it is Platt. She wrote up the Pacific Grove charter in 1927 (introducing the city council-manager system), was elected the town's first female mayor in 1931 (at age 74), drove the first ball struck at Pacific Grove's brand-new golf links in 1932, founded the Women's Civic Improvement Club, and owned a house along Ocean View Avenue that is now part of the picture-postcard Seven Gables Inn.



Before arriving in PG, Platt was a pioneering scientist. Armed with a Harvard graduate degree, she became one of the first women to earn a PhD in zoology. Although she made a number of scientific discoveries regarding germ layers and embryonic development, there were societal limitations on a woman in academia, particularly the sciences in the late 1800s. She couldn't find steady work. So Platt took a left turn in her life - or more accurately, a westward turn, arriving in Pacific Grove in 1899, at the age of 42.

By then, the rich ecology and biodiversity of the Monterey Peninsula had been transformed by the profusion of destructive sardine canneries. As a writer for California Curated explained, "The pollution from canning operations... made the beaches unusable and the smell wafting from Monterey made conditions almost unlivable. Platt decided to redirect her passion for understanding the intricacies of life into preserving it."

As a result, even her footprint as a local citizen and her efforts as a scientist may pale in comparison to her role as a preservationist. Platt didn't just plant much of the flowering vegetation along the coastline and beautify Lovers Point; she introduced a whole new way of thinking - a reminder that the residents of Monterey Bay are also the stewards of its delicate ecosystem. She convinced the city council to petition the state legislature for passage of a law granting Pacific Grove title to the land off its shores, a law that went into effect in 1931. Platt then used her political clout to establish two protected areas off the coast - the Hopkins Marine Life Refuge and the Pacific Grove Marine Gardens. In 2014, the area was renamed the Lovers Point-Julia Platt State Marine Reserve. Credit Platt with sowing the seeds of what is now the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, not to mention the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Platt passed away 91 years ago and has since been honored on occasion - a plaque affixed to a large boulder at Lovers Point, a small park and smaller street named after her in Pacific Grove's Candy Cane Lane neighborhood, and the Julia Platt Club (a scientific speaker series at the University of Massachusetts). But she deserves more.

As an unwavering activist for beach access for all, she famously took a saw and an axe to a gate preventing public admission to Lovers Point Beach. So maybe there shouldn't be a PG Mount Rushmore after all. Instead, how about a bronze statue at Lovers Point showing Dr. Julia Platt with an axe in her hand and a resolute look on her face. She certainly earned it.